



State of Rhode Island
Council on Postsecondary Education
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April 6, 2021

Chairman Marvin L. Abney
Senate Committee on Education
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02908

Re: Related to Article 1- Section 15- Rhode Island Promise

Dear Chairman Abney:

I am writing to express my strong support for Article 1 Section 15 - Rhode Island Promise, which eliminate the 2021 sunset of the Promise Scholarship at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI).

I enthusiastically support continued funding for the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship Program. It is a program that works. Across the nation, similar scholarship programs have proven to be low-cost, high-impact initiatives that increase college participation, improve education attainment levels, and increase earning potential for participants. Rhode Island is no exception. In just four short years, over 8,700 Rhode Island families have benefited from the initiative. Enrollment of recent high school graduates at CCRI has more than doubled, and the statewide college-going rate has also significantly increased as a direct result of the program. Simultaneously, on-time associate degree completion at CCRI has tripled, making it possible for more students to earn their degree quickly and enter the workforce with an academic credential.

With Rhode Island and its workforce recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship Program is a policy tool that is critically important for our state, our students, and our economy. CCRI, now nationally recognized as a top two-year college, offers academic and career pathways that align with the state's economic growth industries. In short, our students are receiving a high-quality education in record time, further equipping our workforce to excel in industries that are growing rapidly in our state and supporting our local economy.

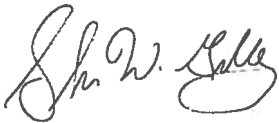
Furthermore, since being established in 2017, the program has benefited students and families from every city and town in the state, but it has

made the largest impact for low-income students and students of color. Compared to the Fall 2016 cohort (the group of students entering the year before the program was established), there has been a 6 times higher 2-year graduation rate for first-time students of color and a 2.6 times higher rate for low-income students.

I am grateful for the General Assembly's past leadership and steadfast commitment to improving educational outcomes for Rhode Island students by making the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship a legislative priority. The scholarship has made it possible for many more Rhode Islanders to go to college, earn an associate degree or transfer to complete a bachelor's degree, and contribute to the state's economy. We urge you to continue to honor that commitment by permanently funding the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship and providing all our students with the opportunity to succeed. This bill will remove a substantial barrier to entry and allow students and families the certainty that a college degree is available to all, not just to those who can afford it.

I appreciate your bringing this budget article forward for consideration. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Shannon Gilkey", written in a cursive style.

Dr. Shannon Gilkey
Commissioner of Postsecondary Education